

Noise: Public health challenges and solutions

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Noise is a major public health challenge. It is major because noise is all pervasive in our societies at a level that it can seriously affect population health and quality of life throughout the lifecourse. It is a challenge because the noise sources are constantly changing as the pace of technology and change gathers globally. As some areas of the world legislate or change their strategies the issue is displaced or changed rather than lessons being learnt and applied globally. There is much that we know in terms of solutions in good practice that is reduced in effectiveness because it is not known widely or is not applied / seen as a priority. There are also huge gaps in our knowledge of current population exposure and effectiveness of new ways to combat noise e.g. in particularly challenged groups such as in military or in airline / airport industry. There is a huge gap in our knowledge of the impact of noise from music or from combined exposures with chemicals on the natural history of impact on hearing, attention, performance, communication and social life. I will present evidence on the impact of noise exposure that seems from the small amount of evidence we have to affect the rate of change of degradation in hearing function beyond the time for which the individual is exposed. Does this apply to all other areas of function affected by noise? We need the research to address these issues! We know that in working age people (up to say 65 years of life) that hearing loss associated with noise is in the top 8 global public health challenges, yet it appears that very little effort is expended globally to tackle this problem by proposing acceptable, cost-effective solutions. However, this statistic really understates the problem, because with greater life expectancy globally the impact of hearing loss and other health issues caused by noise exposure will have a major impact on quality of life and of communication. The need for new policies and research to underpin the development of these is now an urgent public health priority that should be addressed!